

Strengthening families is all of our business

By ROGER SHERMAN
and JAMES HERRMANN
Special to The Press

As the organization in the state designated to lead efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect, the Idaho Children's Trust Fund focuses primarily on how we can strengthen families so that parents have the tools they need to raise healthy, happy children and to discipline without abuse.

The recent incident involving the Farrell family at the Fourth of July parade raises lots of questions about our responsibility to each other. We may never know the facts of this situation, but what we do know is that all of our families need help sometimes. This would be a good opportunity to reach out. Not

just to Rob and Melissa but to our neighbors, to our friends, the folks we go to church with. It is stressful having kids and especially having three toddlers at once. If you're not in it now, think back.

Parental stress is responsible for most abuse. More than 80 percent of child abuse and neglect is committed by parents. Very few people wake up thinking that they are going to abuse their children today. Instead life happens. We lose a job. We're embarrassed about how our kids are acting in public. We're fighting with our spouse. The boss is on my case. And then, we lose it. It can happen to anyone given enough pressure. Are there many of us who can say that there was never a time that we felt like wringing our kid's neck? We just didn't do it.

Guest Opinion

Discipline is important; abuse and violence toward our children is completely unacceptable.

So what do families need to create the best environment possible for raising their children? Research tells us that building five protective factors immunizes families against child abuse. These factors are:

1. Having an ability to bounce back from stress or crisis.
 2. Having social connections and especially having at least one person who supports your parenting.
 3. Having knowledge of parenting and child development.
- We really aren't born with complete

knowledge or skills and we may not have gotten the best training from our own parents.

4. Having access to resources to meet basic needs when you need them. Family stress is often caused by financial distress and an inability to meet the needs of the family.

5. Supporting the social and emotional competence of your children so that they feel loved, like they belong and that they can get along with others. This becomes even more important when a child has special needs of any kind.

You can help cultivate these qualities in your own family and you can support your friends. Take a parenting class. Join a support group or help form one. Have a disciplinary plan and learn the skills to implement it; it will go a long way

toward eliminating abuse in our homes. Contact ICARE in Coeur d'Alene or the Panhandle Health District for parenting resources.

Parents have the primary responsibility for raising healthy and happy children who will grow up to be our communities' policemen, doctors, store owners, social workers, nurses, computer programmers and scientists. Still, it is up to all of us to see that children get the best start possible and to help each other where we can. We really are all in this together.

Roger Sherman is the executive director and James Herrmann of Sagle, the Region 1 board representative of the Idaho Children's Trust Fund, which is charged with preventing child abuse and neglect before it ever occurs.